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ABSTRACT

Year-round schools offer a wide enough variety of scheduling options and educational benefits that all districts should consider adopting a locally appropriate year-round format. The traditional 9-month school year is based not on educational considerations but on the economic conditions that prevailed in preindustrial society--conditions that no longer affect most schools. Three basic types of year-round schools can be distinguished: multitrack schools that accommodate larger numbers of students than traditional programs, schools using single-track programs, and schools that have adopted extended school years by increasing the number of days students attend. In addition to permitting greater flexibility in handling enrollment cycles, year-round scheduling permits more effective use of teaching staffs. Increases in teachers' work years can justify salary increases, but it is not necessary for the additional time to go solely into instruction. Professional development and administrative duties can also be accommodated, providing refreshing variety in the teacher's work. Year-round scheduling has been found particularly beneficial for students ranking in the lower 50 percentiles academically as well, particularly since time away from formal instruction is reduced, yet the studies do not show that other students are hurt. (PGD)

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YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW, 1985

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
National Council on Year-Round Education
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YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW, 1985

It is a rhetorical question, of course, that we in year-round education ask over and over--but a thoughtful question as well:

"If year-round education were the traditional calendar and had been so for one hundred or more years, and if someone were to come along and suggest a "new" calendar wherein children would be without formal instruction for up to three months at a time, would the American public allow, or even consider, such a calendar?"

"Probably not!" many in this room would respond. There would be little reason to adopt a calendar wherein students are programmed to learn formally for nine consecutive months and then are left without formal instruction for three consecutive months. Such a calendar, we would say, is not suitable educational policy. It is poor social policy. And it is not in harmony with the economic realities of an increasingly urban/suburban society in which so many of our people live today.

But the traditional calendar of yesteryear's largely agricultural and rural society still is locked in place in most of America's cities and towns. The traditional calendar continues primarily because of tradition--a force that those of us in the year-round education movement recognize, and work with, and try to alter so that the year-round calendar becomes the standard calendar, and the nine-month calendar eventually becomes the alternative calendar. I'm sometimes asked: "If it ain't broke, why fix it?" My quick response usually is that it (the traditional calendar) is broken, but like the underground plumbing leak, it is not yet perceived generally as broken.

To the traditionalists we must acknowledge that the nine or nine-and-one-half-month calendar served its purpose in past decades. But we must point out that the old calendar was not designed for educational reasons, but for economic reasons.

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Children were needed as farm workers in the middle of the last century, and so America's public school children attended classes on a schedule designed not to interrupt the gathering of the harvest--a task crucially important to the physical and economic well-being of the pioneer family.

But, I ask you: "Which of your students, grades K-9 harvested crops this summer? How many of your high school students harvested crops? Indeed, how many of them worked with any kind of regularity this summer? I would hazard a guess that fewer than 5% of our students, including secondary students, had anything more than a half-time job. Indeed only about 20% of juniors and seniors had half-time or better work. Why, then, have so many schools persisted in a September-June calendar and used student jobs as an argument for tradition?

Parenthetically, there are two year-round schools, in California, which are especially set up to accommodate agricultural communities and their needs. In one school, students are on vacation six weeks in the middle of the fiscal year--the last two weeks of December and all of January. This school, Freedom School, Pajaro Valley Unified, serves the needs of its heavily transient, migrant worker population. But is is open all summer when parents are working in the fields. In the San Luis Coastal School District, a calendar was developed that has differing lengths of time for each period of in-school work. The year-round calendar can be very flexible, and so we encourage all districts to develop a calendar suited to local needs.

I have recently begun emphasizing to audiences that there are now three distinct strands of development in the year-round movement. All three strands redistribute the school year. There is multi-track year-round; there is single-track year-round (sometimes called modified traditional); and there is an extended school year, which has two meanings.

Often year-round education is thought of only as multi-track education. Multi-track was designed to save space on an overcrowded campus. It does that

task, and it does it well. There are, to be sure, extra administrative details to be handled in a multi-track situation (some staff such as principals and secretaries, have more details to handle and greater responsibility). And so, sometimes, criticisms of year-round education come to the national office in this fashion: It's more work, it's more involved, it's disruptive. Most criticism is reflective of multi-track. Opponents of our year-round, multi-track programs, which help to ease overcrowding, focus on the wrong target, and their criticism is unwarranted. The multi-track concept is not the problem. It is the solution. It is the best solution available. The problem is the overcrowding of students into limited space.

I have been concerned for a number of years that those districts which are currently on the multi-track system, or anticipate the multi-track system, have not always prepared the people they serve for the future. Our experience has shown that school overcrowding tends to run in seven- to nine-year cycles, and then a decline of school enrollment sets in. I would encourage those of you from districts already administering multi-track programs, or those of you contemplating going into multi-track programs, to prepare for the future when the decline does occur by urging parents and the community to consider the single-track year-round concept as an alternative to the nine-month calendar, when the decline occurs. I will be very disappointed if those communities which currently have multi-track year-round, and then experience an enrollment decline, were to revert to the traditional, agricultural calendar. Such a step is usually not warranted today.

The second, and increasingly important strand, is the single-track or modified-traditional schedule. In San Diego County during the 1984-85 year, fifty school campuses operated on a year-round calendar. Of the 50, 43 campuses were single-track. Of the 43 single-track, 35 began as multi-track schools to relieve overcrowding, while eight began single-track programs because parents

and teachers thought the pacing of the educational effort would be enhanced. There are districts in the United States where both multi-track and single-track schools operate--some with multiple-track, single-track, and traditional; some with several kinds of calendars; and some with two calendars on the same campus.

One of San Diego County's districts, La Mesa-Spring Valley, has an interesting history of year-round education. La Mesa began the first multi-track year-round program in California back in 1971. Adhering to the seven- to nine-year cycle we have observed, attendance began declining in the late 1970's. By 1980, the district's five year-round schools were operating as single-track campuses. Now the superintendent and board of education have put the schools on a multi-track course again since large housing construction projects are resuming in the area.

Let's now shift to another area of current discussion. Many teacher organizations, national commissions, and educational policy groups are calling for a longer school year and lamenting the low salaries paid to teachers. I think most of us would agree that salaries are too low. I would suggest, however, for your consideration, that the big breakthrough in teachers' salaries will not come until the teacher's work year is substantially longer. If teachers are to be paid $40,000 to $50,000 annually as an average salary, their work year most likely will have to be moved into the range of 205-220 days per contract year. Many teachers will resist what I am saying, because they see the time out of the classroom--for many of them about 14 weeks--as a fringe benefit. Interestingly, many year-round districts are turning to teachers on intersession--on vacation--as a ready source of substitutes, so many teachers have already, on their own, extended their work year.

There is a real world, and it seems very clear--to me, at least--that teachers cannot have both <u>substantially</u> higher salaries and 14 weeks of vacation.

San Diego County Superintendent, Jerry Rosander, has formed a 30-person task force to look at what he calls a "continuous-learning program." Its purpose is twofold: to investigate a longer contract year so that teachers might be paid the salaries which they deserve, and to investigate the learning opportunities that would accrue to students because of the longer year.

Our experience in year-round circles would indicate that there is such a thing as teacher burnout. In the early days of this movement, many teachers were allowed to teach 245 days. A few specialists--in areas where there was little or no homework to grade in the evening--could handle that kind of workload. The average classroom teacher, however, often could not. Some districts have adopted policies which curtail the number of days that teachers can teach in the classroom. When I speak of a longer year for teachers, I am not referring only to more days of classroom instruction. In our expansive and varied programs of today, there are several matters teachers can attend to that are outside the regular classroom and which can be a valuable addition to what goes on in the classroom.

One of the most frequent questions I am asked is: What happens to children's learning?

There are several items of information we do know about student learning in year-round schools. First, there are only three schools--repeat, three schools out of 394 anywhere in the United States that we are aware of that indicate students showing some slippage in year-round schools, even students in schools which operate multi-track programs. In the schools of which I am aware, subsequent study indicated the decline did not come from the year-round schedule, but other factors. There are studies which demonstrate that students in year-round do as well as their traditional calendar counterparts, and in the last couple of years there have been studies that show clearly that year-round-calendar schools do considerably better than

their counterparts in traditional-calendar schools. Now let me ask you: Have you ever heard of schools on the traditional calendar that have experienced a decline in test scores? Shouldn't they leave the traditional calendar?

In this whole discussion of learning I think we need to heed more the findings of the 1978 study of school calendars conducted for the Board of Regents of the State of New York, entitled, "Learning, Retention, and Forgetting." The report, please understand, was not sponsored by the year-round movement since New York has never had, to my knowledge, a year-round school, whether extended-year, or single-, or multi-track.

The New York Regent's report affirms very clearly that programs which shortened the learning time away from formal instruction, such as compensatory Title I, and Head Start programs, were indeed effective in reducing memory loss. To put it another way: The long summer vacation of three months away from formal instruction is detrimental to many students, expecially those in the lower 50 percentiles, which, after all, constitute one-half of all our students in the United States. These students are often the ones who need reteaching regularly and repeated reinforcement.

Why, I have to ask, aren't the students in the lower half of the class as important to us in the education business as those in the upper half? Our lofty statements of educational philosophy often refer to the principle of equal educational opportunity for all students. I say as emphatically as I can, that I believe equal learning opportunity for average and below average students would require more year-round school--in at least the single-track, and perhaps the multi-track and extended-year, modes.

Gifted and college-bound students at the top of the achievement spectrum would not be harmed at all by year-round, since they tend to be continuous learners anyway. Since the bottom half can be helped, logic would require

that we move quickly into a restructured academic year. Well, why don't we do it now? What, other than tradition, is holding us back?

The number of elementary and junior high schools would triple, almost overnight, if we could convince our secondary schools to be a bit more innovative in calendar design. Right now high schools could move into a single-track schedule with little difficulty in scheduling the change. That they haven't done so in greater numbers is disappointing to those of us in year-round education.

Now, to be fair, we must all recognize that scheduling classes in high schools is always a problem, and scheduling in a multi-track high school situation is more difficult for the scheduler. It is not always possible to offer all subjects to all students on all tracks. But let me remind you once again that the culprit in this kind of situation is not multi-track year-round education, but rather the overcrowding that requires a solution. Contrary to popular belief, athletics is not a major problem. Sometimes coaches who are usually traditionalists, think it will be. But boys have traditionally begun football practice off-track (traditional calendar) in August and practiced regularly during Christmas holidays. Sports are seasonal, and fit well with the grading periods of the year-round concept.

The third strand of year-round education is the extended school year. With national commissions calling for a longer school year, the extended year, or, if you will, year-round education, should become a greater force in the future. Governor LaMar Alexander, Tennessee, has urged consideration of the year-round calendar for his state, pointing out that most school buildings in Tennessee are closed to students more than half the time. (In school = 180 days. Out of school = 185 days.) He suggests that with so many potential dropouts and failures, schools can ill afford to be closed so many days. Just as a hospital is open 365 days to treat ill people,

so too, should schools be open most of the time to treat our "ill" students, i.e., those students who are failing.

Clearly, one impetus is coming from comparing our students with those in other industrialized nations: Japan, Germany, England, France.

What is an optimum number of days of instruction for students? That question is open for further consideration. I can make a good case for a longer instructional year, with these provisos: I would include a few more long weekends here and there, and I would alter the instructional program, so that it is more varied; and I would like to expand the kinds of programs we have, such as enriched intersessions and the collegiate "January" concept for special study.

Historical perspective:

Began 1968 - extended year - Federal funding

1969 - 45-15 multi-track began in Illinois

1971 - 45-15 launched in San Diego County, California and grew rapidly

Growth:	1968-1975
Leveling (decline):	1975-1980
Growth:	1980-1985

Kinds of Calendars:

45-15 single and multi	trimester
60-20 single and multi	quarter
60-15 single and multi	quinmester
90-30 single and multi	Concept 6
Continuous year	Concept 6 modified
Five-track semester	1-track, 2-track, 3-track 4-track, 5-track

It is a local option, and new calendars are being devised all the time.

Closing.
End.